

Fund Cuts Hinted For Foes of SST

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Several federal agencies may have been threatened with a budget hatchet job if they reported evidence unfavorable to development of a U.S. supersonic transport, a scientist testified yesterday.

Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) said that if the report is true it is "the modern equivalent of cutting off the tongue of the messenger who brings the bad news."

Appearing before Proxmire's Joint Economic Committee, Dr. Harold S. Johnston, professor of chemistry at the University of California at Berkeley, said he had heard such accounts at least twice.

He said officials of the Bureau of Standards told him they had been warned by an officer of the White House Office of Management and Budget that their money requests might suffer "if we don't give right—and that means favorable—information on SST development."

Johnston said his information was second- and third-hand "hearsay." But he said similar reports have been circulating about other agencies concerned with SST development or research.

"Apparently, the Budget Bureau is asking for only good news and the agencies are being asked to suppress the bad news—so far as the SST is concerned," Proxmire said.

Proxmire was the principal congressional architect last year of the defeat of federal SST financing. His current hearings are intended to examine reports the White House is actively weighing a new \$5.5 billion SST development program.

"My own attitude now is that the SST may someday be built and put into operation," Proxmire said, "and I'm all in favor of that as long as all the environmental and other problems are solved and it can be financed privately and not by the federal government."

Because federal and aviation industry officials declined invitations to appear, most of the witnesses in two days of hearings represented the case against the SST.

Unlike the others, Johnston said he has no position on the project. But he reported there is some evidence of possible destruction of life-preserving ozone in the stratosphere if SSTs fly there.

"There is strong evidence that nitrogen oxides from SST exhaust could seriously reduce stratospheric ozone," he said. "But in every case the evidence can be matched by a possibility the SST would have little or no effect."

He said that doesn't mean the evidence should be discarded and added: "A careful, quantitative, impartial trial by jury is strongly indicated."